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AUTHOR Kitao, S. Kathleen; Kitao, Kenji
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ABSTRACT

It is sometimes difficult to motivate Japanese students to learn English because it is not connected with their everyday life or interests. One method found to be effective at the college level in Japan is to teach students about other cultures in English by preparing slide programs with narration, vocabulary lists, and exercises, supported by background readings with their own exercises. Possible topics for the slide presentations include famous or interesting places, aspects of daily life, ceremonies, and other visually interesting aspects of another country. Background reading should be interesting and relate to the slides, but it need only overlap, not correspond exactly to the narration. Vocabulary lists are developed from the text, possibly with the spelling-check feature of a computer program. Some useful learning activities are skimming, charting, organization, cloze, outline, dictation, correction, and pause and intonation exercises to be used with the readings and narration. A wide variety of followup activities can be used, such as student-prepared slide presentations, visits to famous places in the students' own country, or photograph albums. (MSE)

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Motivating Students to Learn English by Combining Slide Presentations with Reading and Listening

S. Kathleen Kitao
Michigan State University
Kenji Kitao
Doshisha University
Kyoto, Japan

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Running Head: SLIDE PRESENTATIONS WITH READING AND LISTENING

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Abstract

In working with Japanese college students over the past several years, we have found that it is sometimes difficult to motivate them to learn English. English does not seem to be real to them. It is not connected with their everyday life or interests. In trying to motivate students to learn English, it is important to present them with something that they are interested in. One thing that many Japanese students are interested in is other cultures. Therefore one solution for the problem of lack of motivation is to teach students about other cultures in English. One effective way we have found of doing this is by making slide programs with narration, vocabulary lists and exercises, supported by background readings with their own exercises. In this paper, we explain how to make these slide programs and to use them in class, and provide some suggestions for follow-up activities. These materials have been very successful for us in motivating college students in Japan, and we believe that they would be useful in other settings, too.

Motivating Students to Learn English by Combining Slide Presentations with Reading and Listening

In our experience teaching English to Japanese college students, we have often found that motivation is a problem. One of the reasons that Japanese students are not motivated to learn English is that it does not seem real to them. It is not connected to the "real world" that students know. Studying English does not seem to have any particular use, expect perhaps to help students get good grades on English tests. Few students have ever used English to do anything that they want to be able to do (Kitao, 1983).

One Solution

One of the keys to motivating students to learn English, according to Rivers (1972), is to let them study something that they are interested in. Because most Japanese students are interested in foreign countries and foreign cultures, one way of motivating them is to let them use English to learn more about other cultures (Hildebrant & Howard, 1980). This allows students to use English to do something that they want to be able to do--learn more about other cultures.

For aspects of other cultures to be real to students, they have to do more than read or hear about them.

Students also have to have something that they can see. Visual aids both reinforce the impressions made by language and make an object, event or situation more real and more memorable to students (Stack, 1966). Many things are difficult or impossible to understand or visualize if you have not seen them. For example, students may read articles about Yellowstone National Park or a traditional American wedding ceremony, but unless they have seen them--or seen pictures of them--they cannot understand them well.

Especially in the typically large English classes found in Japan, it is difficult to use photographs. Slides are particularly useful in such cases. Slides are large and clear enough for all students to see. They are relatively easily available, compared with some other media, such as films or video (Willis, 1983) and are inexpensive and easily handled and stored (Hirsch, 1954). Slides are most effective when used in synchronization with audio material (Stack, 1966). When slides on a particular subject are not available, they can be made from photographs, pictures in books, and post cards.

We have made three slide presentations for students. They are about Niagara Falls, Boston, and New York. Each has a reading, which gives students background about the

subject of the slide presentation, a narrated slide presentation, and vocabulary lists and exercises for the reading and for the narration of the slide presentation.

It is possible to use wide variety of subjects for this type of materials. Obvious choices are famous places in other countries. It is also possible to use aspects of daily life, ceremonies such as a wedding, and so on. Of course, you would want to choose a subject that is visually interesting, since it makes the best use of this type of material.

The background reading is important. One reason that students have difficulty with listening comprehension is that they know little about what to expect as they listen. Because listening is a receptive skill, it is usually thought of as a passive skill. However, this is not accurate. A listener does not just take in what he/she hears (Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill & Pincas, 1978). The listener tries to fit what he/she hears with the knowledge of the world that he/she already has. If what is heard fits in with the background knowledge that is already known, listening is much easier than if the information is completely new (Smith, 1971). If little or nothing is known about a subject, it is more difficult to understand a discussion of it, since it does not "fit

in" with anything that the listener already knows. This is especially true when listening to something in a foreign language. If they already know something about the subject, students find it easier to understand what they hear. Therefore, the purpose of a background reading is to help students better understand the narration of the slide presentation when they hear it.

Making the Background Reading

The methods that we use in the reading section were based on our experience in making experimental reading textbooks over the past five years. Some of these have been published in the US and Japan.[1]

The background reading can include different types of information, depending on the nature of the subject. For our reading about Niagara Falls, we gave students much of the same information that they would hear in the narration, but not all of it. This way, they would find both new information and old information as they listened to the narration. This approach is useful for lower level students. The amount of overlapping background information can be adjusted to the level of the students. More advanced students need less background information. In preparation for the slides and narration on famous Boston landmarks, students read about the involvement of

Boston in the American Revolution, since many of the landmarks are related to that period of American history. Thus, the famous places that they saw and heard about were more meaningful when students knew something about their history. In writing the background reading, you should think about the level of the students and what information will be helpful in understanding the narration.

After the reading has been written or chosen, the next step is to make a list of vocabulary words that need to be defined. If possible, use a vocabulary list for your students' academic level as the basis for the list of words you define. If such a list is not available, a number of frequency and difficulty lists exist. (See Rivers, 1978, for a discussion of these.) Words that are not on the basic list, plus any that have special meanings, should be defined. We have found that it is a good general rule to limit the number of words that have to be defined to less than five percent of the total words in the text. If more than five percent need to be defined, the reading will probably be too difficult and frustrating for students.

When we began working on reading material, we found the words that needed to be defined by going through the texts word-for-word. One way to do this that saves a

great deal of time and energy in this task is to use a personal computer and a spelling check program. You can replace the program's dictionary with the vocabulary list you are using, and then run the program on your reading text. The result will be a list of words that are not on your vocabulary list--the words you need to define. This can save much time in checking words in your text against your vocabulary list.

You should also give students exercises that guide their understanding of the text. There are many different types of exercises. Later in this paper, we will discuss some of these exercises, in the section that deals with listening exercises. Some of the exercises used for listening can be adapted for the reading. Here, we will discuss one type of exercise that is only applicable to the reading section.

Skimming exercises help students learn to look for specific information quickly or to get an overall idea of the reading. For the skimming exercise, either ask for specific pieces of information or ask questions about the general content or layout of the reading. When doing the skimming exercise, students should be given a limited amount of time to answer the questions, since the point to skimming exercises is to look for the information quickly.

Making the Narration

For each project, we made a programmed tape with the vocabulary words, the text, and exercises. Slides were synchronized with the text on the tape. (Even if you do not put all this on the tape, you should put the text on tape, since it is repeated several times.) We also made printed support materials that included the list of vocabulary words on the tape with difficult words defined in English, and exercises.

Through our experiences, we have found that a five-minute narration with a vocabulary list and several exercises can fill a ninety minute class. During that time period, students listen to the five-minute narration a total of six or more times.

For most students, it is best to limit the narration to less than five minutes. We found that most of our students did not have a long enough attention span to listen to English for longer than that. (Of course, this depends, in part, on the level of the students and the amount of experience they have had listening to English.) If you need more than five minutes, and your students' attention span is not long enough, it is possible to divide the narration into two parts. In writing the narration, keep in mind that the slides should help the

students comprehend it. The narration should be written in a way that the slides support the students' comprehension. As you write or select the narration, choose slides related to the points you want to include. When you have finished writing, re-consider the slides to see if they help the listeners understand the narration.

You should also make a vocabulary list for the text, with definitions, to be given to students in advance of listening to the narration. This list of vocabulary words should be made on the same principles as the one for the reading, but we have found, in our experience, that if the number of words on the list exceeds two or three percent of the total number of words, students will find the listening passage too difficult. It is useful to also include words and collocations on the list that the students should know by sight but that they may not recognize when they hear. This is especially important if the students live in a country where English is not used in everyday life, so that they rarely have a chance to hear it spoken. Before the students listen to the narration, they should listen to the vocabulary words and repeat each word.

Various types of exercises can be used with the narration.[2] We will describe a few of them here and give

some general guidelines for making them. These are not intended to be inflexible rules. How each exercise is made depends on the situation and the level of the students. As mentioned above, some of these are also able to be used as exercises for the reading section. Listening exercises, along with the vocabulary list and definitions, are given to students as printed support material.

Listening exercises should be arranged from general to specific. The first exercises should require only a general understanding of a topic or a section of the narration. Later exercises require students to comprehend more specific points and even to distinguish specific words.

Pre-listening exercises

Pre-listening exercises help students learn to anticipate what they will be hearing about so that they will comprehend it better (Paulston & Bruder, 1976). They can take various forms, depending on what is appropriate for the particular narration. For example, you can have students look at the title or listen to the first few sentences of the narration and then ask them what they think it's going to be about and what kind of information it is likely to include. You can also ask them questions

that will elicit the information they already know about the subject (Where is Niagara Falls located? What is it famous for?), or ask them to list the things they would like to know about the subject (Grellet, 1981).

Comprehension Questions

Comprehension questions help students find the main ideas and important details. The answers to comprehension questions can come directly from the narration or can require students to put together two or more pieces of information. They may also require students to understand unstated implications (Paulston & Bruder, 1976). The most common types of comprehension questions are short answer, true/false, and multiple choice questions. In the case of true/false and multiple choice, it is important that the false statements or incorrect choices are plausible in the context. The true statements or correct choices should be paraphrases of the text. This helps keep students from answering questions without understanding either the question or the answer (Rivers & Temperly, 1978). Unless the students are advanced, it may be helpful to give them a sentence to answer the short answer question, with blanks for the key words. In that way, students do not have to worry about producing a sentence, only finding the answer to the question (Paulston & Bruder, 1976).

Chart Exercise

If the narration has two or more parallel series of information, you can put the information in a chart. Leave blanks in the chart and ask students to fill in the blanks. This helps students organize the information and see the relationships among various pieces of information (Grellet, 1981).

Organization Exercise

In an organization exercise, students are given a list of topics from the narration. The students put the topics in the order that they occur in the narration, or in chronological order. This helps students understand the overall organization of the text or its time sequence. If the exercise involves putting the topics in the order of that they are discussed in the narration, this only requires a general understanding of the meaning.

Cloze Exercise

For a cloze exercise, either write a summary of the narration or transcribe a short section of it. Leave blanks for some of the words. You can leave either function words or content words blank, depending on whether you want to emphasize grammatical structure or content (Rivers & Temperly, 1978). Have students fill in the blanks while listening to the narration. A cloze

exercise that is a summary of the narration helps students learn to deal with the same information in a different form. One that is based on a transcription helps students learn to distinguish particular words, especially unstressed words.

Outline Exercise

An outline exercise is the same as a cloze exercise, except that it is done in outline form. In addition to helping students deal with the same information in a different form, it helps students see the relative importance of the pieces of information. More advanced students can use the outline to learn to do outlines themselves.

Dictation Exercise

For a dictation exercise, choose some sentences from the narration. (Start with sentences of about ten words and increase the number of words to fifteen or twenty.) Read each sentence to students three times, once at normal speed, once slowly phrase by phrase, and the last time a little slower than normal speed.

Correction Exercise

For a correction exercise, students are given a transcript of a section of the narration, but with errors. As they listen to the section of the narration twice, they

find and correct the errors. Different kinds of errors can be used, including omitting, adding or changing words.

Pause and Intonation Exercise

For this exercise, give students a transcript a section of the text, but with no punctuation and no capital letters at the beginnings of sentences. Have them listen to that section, marking long and short pauses or rises and falls in intonation. Students then figure out where periods and commas should be. This exercise helps students understand the relationships among intonation, pauses, and units of meaning in English.

These are just a few of the main types of exercises. Obviously, which ones you use will depend on your students and the characteristics of the narration.

Procedure

First, students listen to the list of vocabulary words and repeat each word. This has two purposes. It refreshes students' memories on the vocabulary they studied and gives them an opportunity to hear the words, some of which they may never have heard before.

Next, they listen to the entire narration, while watching the slides. As a general rule, it is best to give students something specific to listen for each time they listen to the narration (Cervantes & Noji, 1984).

The first time students listen to the narration, as they watch the slides, an organization exercise is useful. Students read the list of topics first and then listen to the narration and watch the slides. After they have listened to the narration, they put the topics in order.

For the purpose of doing the rest of the exercises, the narration should be divided into sections. Students read or listen to the questions and then listen to a section of the narration. They mark tentative answers to questions during or after the first listening. Then they listen to the section of the narration again to check their answers (Rivers & Temperly, 1978). For the first set of questions (for example, true/false), this is done on sections of the narration thirty seconds to one minute long. For the next set of questions, (for example, short answer questions) you can combine these short sections to make longer sections.

Next, you can do exercises that require students to listen to the entire narration, or a long section of it, for example, an outline or cloze exercise. The advantage of this technique is that students listen to the narration several times, but they do not get bored with it, because they listen to it in sections and have a task each time they listen. It seem to be helpful to finish up by having

the students see the slides and listen to the narration for the last time. This gives students an opportunity to relax and enjoy the slide program, once they understand what it is about.

Follow-Up Activities

There are many interesting possibilities for follow-up to this type of activity. For further study, students can find more information about the subject of the slide presentation. If the listed the things they wanted to know about the subject as a pre-listening or pre-reading activity, they can use the topics not covered by the reading or slide presentation as a guide for their further study.

Students can also make slide projects of their own, either individually or in groups. If your students come from different parts of the country, they can do slide presentations with narrations about their own hometowns during the summer break. Students can also visit famous places in the local area and make slide projects about those places. Projects can also be done on some aspect of the students' own culture. These projects can be shared with the rest of the class. If doing slide projects is not feasible, students can put together photograph albums with captions in English describing the pictures.

We believe that this type of material is very useful in motivating students to study English. It also has the advantage of teaching them about other cultures and other countries. Judging from the feedback at the end of the course, our students seem to find the slide presentations one of the most memorable experiences in our classes.

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Footnotes

1 The reading textbooks we have published include:

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2 Exercises described here are based on ones developed for Arima, T., Kitao, K., Kitao, S.K., & Yoshioka, K. (1984). Enjoying America: Through the ear. Tokyo: Eihosha.